

***Deeper Than Darwin: The Prospect for Religion in the Age of Evolution*, by John F. Haught. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003. xvi + 214 pp. Index.**

This past summer, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Vienna and lead editor of the 1992 Catechism of the Catholic Church, published a letter in the *New York Times* titled “Finding Design in Nature.”¹ The Cardinal’s basic claim was that Darwinian evolution is incompatible with the Church’s belief in God-given purpose and design in nature. A response by Father George Coyne, S.J., Director of the Vatican Observatory, published in *The Tablet*, took issue with this claim.² Coyne presented an opposing view, one in which God does not intervene in the evolutionary process, but out of love allows the universe to evolve as it will. Against this backdrop—and that of a current national debate about whether or not a “disclaimer” regarding the theory of evolution should be added to biology textbooks in schools—John Haught’s recent book *Deeper than Darwin* seems particularly timely and appropriate. It can help Catholics to address the question, Under what circumstances is a belief in evolution compatible with Catholic belief? (For the record, Haught’s answer is that the two

are compatible as long as by “evolution” one does not mean the materialistic version promoted by philosopher Daniel Dennett and scientist Richard Dawkins.)

Deeper than Darwin is a sequel to an earlier book, *God after Darwin*, in which Haught, who is Professor of Theology at Georgetown University, argued that religious belief and evolution are entirely compatible. Not comfortable with just saying that religion and evolution are compatible, however, Haught has gone on to argue in the current book that because the universe is inexhaustibly deep, neither intelligent design nor evolutionary materialism is adequate to explain it. He promotes a theology of “engagement” in which the scientific findings of evolutionary biology are accepted, but also are recognized as insufficient for understanding the tremendous depth of the reality of the universe. Only religion can begin to plumb this depth.

The book is divided into thirteen chapters, along with a preface, introduction, notes section and index. The titles of the chapters give clues to their contents: “A Reading Problem,” “The Depth of Nature,” “Deeper than Dawkins,” “Deeper than Design,” “Truth after Darwin,” “Darwin and the Deities,” and “A Deeper Theology.” Part or all of eight of the chapters are adapted from articles published elsewhere. For example, Chapter Twelve is from a 2001 lecture comparing Paul Tillich and Teilhard de Chardin that was presented at the North American Paul Tillich Society. Similarly, Chapter Nine is a response to Frederick Crews’ Dawkins-like criticism of *God after Darwin* that appeared in Crews’ mammoth review (ten other books were included as well) in the *New York Review of*

¹ Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, “Finding Design in Nature,” *New York Times*, July 7, 2005, late edition (final), A23.

² George Coyne, S.J., “God’s Chance Creation,” *The Tablet* (August 6, 2005), <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/cgi-bin/register.cgi/tablet-01063>.

Books in 2001. One of the unfortunate consequences of having adaptations of previous work as chapters is that there inevitably are variations in style such that the chapters do not flow together quite as well as they would if they had been freshly written. Indeed, Chapter Nine, the one rebutting Crews, is very tightly written. On the other hand, Chapter Ten, which appears to have been written for the book, is more leisurely paced.

Deeper than Darwin emphasizes that religion, unlike science, is unique in that its *raison d'être* is to strive to come to grips with reality in its inexhaustible and infinite depth. Haught divides the participants in the great debate about science (particularly, biology) and religion into four groups: (1) evolutionary biologists, (2) evolutionary materialists, (3) intelligent design theory (IDT) proponents, and (4) evolutionary theists. He argues that groups 2 and 3 have what he calls a "reading problem," in that they are unable to understand the universe at multiple levels simultaneously. He writes, "In their common aversion to a multiplicity of distinct reading levels, both IDT and evolutionary materialism are willing to settle for a world devoid of depth, taking refuge in their respective versions of literalism" (97).

On the other hand, he notes that rank-and-file evolutionary biologists (group 1) are generally not averse to religion and that evolutionary theists (group 4), by believing in nature's ultimate intelligibility and infinite depth, actually provide a favorable environment for open scientific inquiry. Clearly, Haught himself falls into the fourth group, which he describes as having a theological response that "engages" with science. Moreover, this group, as defined by Haught, has a distinct *process* orientation after the traditions of Alfred North Whitehead and Karl Rahner. A strong theme in his earlier books, including *God after Darwin* and *The Promise of Nature: Ecology and Cosmic Purpose*, Haught's process orientation is featured prominently here as well. For example, in the chapter "Deeper than Dawkins," he writes:

[The immensity of cosmic duration] provides the scope for a high degree of

spontaneity and contingency in the origin of the first living cell, in the remarkable transformations in the life-story during the Cambrian period, and in such events as meteorite impacts that drastically alter the biosphere and open up new avenues for evolutionary experimentation. Nature's contingencies and evolution's randomness are not indicative of a divine impotence, but of a God caring and self-effacing enough to wait for the genuine emergence of what is truly other than God, with all the risk, tragedy and adventure this patience entails (80).

In several places in the book, Haught emphasizes the *narrative* character of nature. "Life, after all, *is* a story," he writes (47). Evolutionary biologists should embrace the narrative character of evolution revealed by scientific discovery. Moreover—and this is the heart of his argument in the book—the nature of evolution as a contingent, apparently random story should lead us to "cease looking for design as evidence of purpose and instead look deeper—into what I have been calling the promise of nature" (53).

Haught's strong belief in the central importance of the *promise* of nature appears to arise from his recognition of the vital importance of eschatology (future-orientation) for Christian belief. His focus on eschatology has caused him to tangle in the past with other theologians, particularly Passionist priest and theologian Thomas Berry, who has warned that an over-emphasis on the attainment of future perfection can cause us to abandon our concern and care for today's natural world. Berry, Haught maintains, has focused too much on the sacramentality of the earth as opposed to the eschatology of creation. Yet, some of the discussion in Chapter Twelve might lead the reader to ask, Has Haught gone too far the *other* way, placing all of his theological eggs in the eschatological basket?

In Chapter Twelve, which contains the lecture presented at the Paul Tillich Society, Haught discusses the relative merits of Tillich's versus Teilhard's ideas for the de-

velopment of a comprehensive theology of evolution. On the Tillich-Teilhard scale, he ends up favoring Teilhard, arguing that Tillich's ideas are not up to the task.³ But in the process of arguing that the contributions of Teilhard rather than Tillich are more valuable in the task of forging a much-needed theology of evolution, Haught makes a number of statements that might call forth questions from the reader. Some of his statements, along with the questions they raise, are presented below:

- *Haught*: "The incompleteness of the cosmic project logically implies, therefore, that the universe and human existence have never, under any circumstances, been situated in a condition of ideal fullness and perfection" (168). *Questions*: Does this imply that the earth today and in its previous stages of evolution is and was less *valuable* than it will be in the future? Moreover, we can talk about the "sacred Earth." Was the earth less sacred in the past because it was less perfect? What does this mean about how we should treat the earth today? Finally, is the earth still evolving toward the future state of perfection despite our (human) efforts to destroy her (for example, by human-induced global warming)?
- On the subject of original sin, Haught argues, with Teilhard, that there is no longer a need to propose a "primordial mishap" (Teilhard's words quoted in Haught's book) to explain the appearance of evil. *Haught*: "Evolution ...

means that the world is unfinished. But if it is unfinished, then we cannot justifiably expect it yet to be perfect. It *inevitably* has a dark side" (169, original emphasis). *Questions*: Does not this effectively transfer the origin of evil from the human heart to the very fabric of the evolving universe? How does this relate to the notion of the *goodness* of creation? And if the world intrinsically has aspects that are evil, does this mean that we can feel free to abuse the world?

- On the topic of redemption and restoration of the world, Haught writes, "a scientifically informed understanding of redemption may no longer plausibly make themes of restoration or recovery [in Jesus] dominant" (170). Further, "in Tillich's thought, as in the classical metaphysics of pre-evolutionary theology, the futurity of being is still subordinated to the idea of an eternal presence of being." Such thinking "clips the wings of hope" that a full embrace of future evolutionary possibilities would bring (172). *Questions*: Is not the co-existence of both a still-evolving universe and a need for redemption in Jesus a *mystery* that we do not understand? Based on what science has revealed about evolution, are we to conclude that ancient biblical scholars (for example) had no understanding of truth? And should we therefore throw all of the pre-evolutionary babies out with the evolutionary bath water?
- *Haught*: "Teilhard was especially concerned to develop a vision of the world in which young and old alike could feel genuinely that their lives and actions truly matter, that their existence is not just 'killing time' but potentially contributing to the creation of a cosmos. Evolution provides the context for such a vision" (174). Further, "our complicity in evil may now be interpreted less in terms of a hypothesized break from primordial innocence than as our systematic refusal to participate in the ongoing creation of the world" (175).

³ Recall that Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest, proposed in the 1950s that the universe is on an evolutionary journey toward the "Omega point," i.e., God. This journey is marked by an increase in complexity. In Teilhard's scheme, far from having come to a standstill with the dominance of earth by humans, evolution is progressing to the next, human-centered phase of evolutionary development, the "noosphere." Teilhard, it seems, had an unbounded confidence in the ability of human culture and society to help bring all of creation to future perfection in God.

Questions: In reference to this definition of sin as laziness, i.e., our tendency to not cooperate with the progressive movement of the universe toward perfection, are not humans and other creatures of the earth *intrinsically* valuable, regardless of how lazy they might appear? What would St. Francis of Assisi have said to Haught on this point? Are animals worth less because they cannot participate in building the “noosphere” as we can? Moreover, who decides what “the ongoing creation of the world” involves? Finally, is not just *being* enough?

In contrast to Chapter Twelve, which, as we see, gives us more questions than answers, Chapter Eleven, titled “Deeper than Death,” brings us back to Haught’s Whiteheadian process orientation. Here, Haught gives us consolation that all is not lost upon death. He reminds us that each moment of our existence is taken up and held in the mind of God, where it remains in its full immediacy. Nothing that is real is lost or forgotten. This process view fits well with the image of an unfolding, and evolving, universe that biology and physics are giving us today.

In conclusion, *Deeper than Darwin* goes beyond the mere statement that Christianity and evolution are compatible. It argues that we must turn to religion, with its ancient interest in plumbing the depths of reality, in order to understand life and the universe. Provocative in its strong emphasis on the consonance between the notion of progress in evolution and the future-oriented (eschatological) aspects of Christianity, *Deeper than Darwin* gives us much to consider as we reflect anew on the significance of scientific theory for religious belief.

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